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ABSTRACT

Using typical statements made by teachers and school administrators as examples, this self-help primer offers tips for developing conversational patterns that promote interpersonal understanding. The tips are designed to help readers learn about 40 effective conversational habits, including being specific, talking sparingly, admitting mistakes, listening actively, accepting compliments appropriately, using humor productively, being venturesome, accepting others' uniqueness, taking the initiative, and avoiding such blocks to communication as minimizing other people, threatening, scapegoating, belittling, committing verbal abuse, using sarcasm, and giving advice. For each conversational habit dealt with, the primer offers a brief discussion of it and presents sample statements representing preferred and nonpreferred ways of talking to another person. (GT)

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Straight Talk

A COMMUNICATION PRIMER

by Robert Maidment

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As a street is not a street
As much as how you walk it,
So speech is not speech
As much as how you talk it.

—R. M.

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Preface

This is a very small book about a very large topic. These bits and pieces of conversation, or straight talk, form a basic primer for effective communication. The items, extolled *ad nauseum* in books, endure *ad hominem* in conversations. The items, therefore, will be familiar even though the packaging is different. The items, although couched in arbitrary human settings, are paradoxically universal. The items are not exhaustive, either. I've just not recognized and recorded other examples. This only ensures the smallness of the book. The topic remains very large.

Many self-help books figuratively urge readers to wear WIN buttons—win through influencing others, or win through intimidation. If one inadvertently wears a WIN button upside down, however, it now reads NIM—No Instant Miracles. That's *very* appropriate. Self-improvement is often tedious and, during transition, unrewarding. Relearning something we've practiced so hard to make imperfect *is* difficult!

Generally, we're dealing with human interaction. Conversation is a preferred and socially acceptable medium. But how we do mess it up sometimes! Specifically, we're dealing with three words. Awareness. Openness. Risk. These words effortlessly convert to three probing questions. Am I aware of what's happening? Am I open to valid criticism? Am I willing to risk a change? It only took me

half a lifetime, for example, to understand the simple notion that most kidding from the receiver viewpoint is not pleasantly harmless, but painfully hostile. Being aware of this I can now zap others with greater pleasure, or I can notice the signs of displeasure I cause and change my behavior.

I suspect that few of us can note these 40 straight talk items and not recognize some personal conversation patterns which impede understanding. Fortunately, as we've learned these patterns, so can we unlearn them. Though there is a slight bit of risk involved, the potential pay-off serves as an incentive. Straight talk *can* improve the quality of life in all human settings. No instant miracles, perhaps, but a guarantee worth claiming.

Robert Maidment

Williamsburg, Virginia
1980

Straight Talk 3
Be Specific

What Is Happening

The most effective way for anyone to get a need satisfied is to ask for it—clearly and openly. The listener now has three basic options: (1) to provide unconditionally, (2) to provide conditionally, or (3) to deny. To avoid denials or to defend against the hurt a denial would cause, we often express our needs covertly or subvertly. Now, the listener is unsure and has a raft of responses available to cut us adrift.

What I Say

Journalism teacher to principal: "When you prepare next year's schedule, I'd like to make some suggestions."

What I Can Learn To Say

"Next year I want my planning period at the end of the day. On those days immediately prior to printing deadlines I need uninterrupted time with the newspaper staff."

Straight Talk 5
Stop When Finished

What Is Happening

One certain way to turn off a listener is to repeat a message ad nauseum. But, we persist in belaboring, or worse, in rebirthing our thoughts again, again, and again. Redundancies weaken the impact of a message. How many afternoon matinees can one endure? Also, like most social diseases, the malady is contagious.

What I Say

All of the above.

What I Can Learn To Say

The first sentence in the above paragraph. Period.

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Straight Talk 1
Avoid Minimizing

What Is Happening

Anytime we're told that what is important to us, isn't, we tend to feel worse. Our concerns are very real, and we don't appreciate anyone discounting them for us. My problem and I are one and the same. Shortchange my problem and you shortchange me. Better to deal with me. Help me deal with my problem by dealing with me.

What I Say

Counselor to pupil: "Janice, your problem isn't really as bad as it seems. Lots of students fail algebra. Just forget it. You'll do better next marking period."

What I Can Learn To Say

"Janice, you're really concerned about receiving your first failing grade. Let's talk about it together."

Straight Talk 2
Curtail the Whys

What Is Happening

Although school professionals are adroit observers of behavior, most of us are neither trained nor licensed therapists. We tend, nonetheless, to search for causality in pupil behavior. Cite a recent action and mentally recall *why* you did what you did. Having difficulty? Yet we persist in demanding that our students tell us why they did whatever they did. Trade rationalizations for objective realities. Trade "whys" for "whats."

What I Say

Teacher to ninth grader: "I want to know, Sue, why you didn't follow my instructions."

What I Can Learn To Say

"Sue, something didn't go right just now. Can you describe what happened?"

Straight Talk 4
Eliminate Shoulds

What Is Happening

We educators have a penchant for speaking in "shoulds." This generally unsolicited paternalism seems appropriate in adult-child environments. Unfortunately, "shouldism" is preemptive. It's a denial of the other person. And the learner is the one universally denied.

What I Say

Teacher to pupil: "Tom, you should listen when I'm talking!"

What I Can Learn To Say

"I'm annoyed when you read while I'm talking, Tom, because I now must repeat everything."

Straight Talk 6
Don't Threaten

WHAT IS HAPPENING

One devastating killer phrase is implying that dire consequences will inexorably follow a specific action. The words, particularly spoken under stress, are often regretted. Threats come wrapped in many packages--all ultimately returnable to the sender.

WHAT I SAY

Middle school teacher on lunch duty to pupil: "The very next time I catch you breaking line, Bradley, you and I are taking a quick walk to the office!"

WHAT I CAN LEARN TO SAY

If it's the first time, say nothing. Walk toward the student and make eye contact. Smile slightly and nod toward the end of the lunch line. Bradley will get the message. He might even appreciate it.

Straight Talk 7
Talk Sparingly

WHAT IS HAPPENING

A law of two-thirds prevails in most classrooms. Two-thirds of the time someone is talking. Two-thirds of the time that someone is the instructor. And two-thirds of what the instructor is saying is irrelevant. Quite an indictment! Save the words for information which can't be packaged more appropriately, for giving directions, for motivating, and on occasion, for evaluating. Tellers are for banks.

WHAT I SAY

Instructor to class: "Let me review _____ for you."

(a) the political conditions leading to the War of 1812
(b) what Melville really meant
(c) Boyle's Law

WHAT I CAN LEARN TO SAY

Nothing now. Select another method. It will be better. You can bet on it.

Straight Talk 8
Diminish Self-Preoccupation

What Is Happening

If any malady is chronically pandemic, it is preoccupation with self. An unmistakable characteristic of those afflicted is the frequent use of "I," "me," "my," and "mine." Territorial warnings. When a school librarian, for example, speaks of "my library," beware. You're about to encroach upon a bookkeeper, not a booklender.

What I Say

Principal to custodian: "Ben, I'm hosting a special parent study committee in a few hours and this place looks crummy. Your lack of concern is making me look bad!"

What I Can Learn To Say

"I know I've been asking you to do extra work lately, Ben. We'll talk about it as soon as we can. Meanwhile, please give the main hallways a quick sweep, and I'll help you set up the meeting room before this group arrives."

Straight Talk 9
Provide Deserving Strokes

WHAT IS HAPPENING

Everyone needs some positive strokes. When we're denied occasional work-related recognition we might justifiably feel that our efforts are unappreciated. It's as if we were invisible. One common response to being unseen is to behave in a way that ensures some stroking—even if it's negative. At least we're no longer invisible. If you haven't noticed, children are quite adroit at soliciting stokes. Remember?

WHAT I SAY

Coach to player who has performed unusually well in practice: "_____."

WHAT I CAN LEARN TO SAY

"Jim, I'm really pleased with your work today. You appear to feel good about it too!"

Straight Talk 10
Stop Scapegoating

What Is Happening

When we know who the culprit is, but censure an entire group, we're scapegoating. Worse still is when the group must share guilt-by-association with an unknown miscreant. By resorting to the if-the-shoe-fits-wear-it approach we're acknowledging ignorance of the situation, refusing to deal directly with conflict, or capriciously abusing the entire group.

What I Say

Principal to faculty: "When you people turn your grade cards in after my deadline, you foul up the whole reporting system!"

What I Can Learn To Say

(Privately to an individual teacher.) "Please let me know as soon as possible anytime your grade reports will be late. At least when delays are anticipated, we can sometimes re-work the computer schedules."

Straight Talk 11
Admit Mistakes

What Is Happening

If there were an eleventh commandment etched in stone exclusively for school personnel it would be, "I don't have to be right." The amount of pain inflicted upon children by those who are permanently right and righteous is incalculable. There's no problem with the master-in-charge having clout, but he or she isn't omniscient. Self-appropriated divine rights can become earthly wrongs.

What I Say

Teacher to class: "I don't care what you saw on '60 Minutes,' what I said in class last Thursday is correct!"

What I Can Learn To Say

"I admit I made a mistake."

Straight Talk 12
Deal With, Not Talk About

WHAT IS HAPPENING

Delay, linger, and wait specialists are easily recognized. They are predictably certain to talk about, over, under, around, and through most issues. Trouble is, they don't deal *with* them. They suffer from "aboutism." Pontification and procrastination are, at best, unwelcomed polysyllabics.

WHAT I SAY

Teacher in grade-level meeting: "Let's table the textbook issue. We need more time to think about a change."

WHAT I CAN LEARN TO SAY

"We've already agreed to a text change. Before we adjourn let's adopt an action plan for doing it."

Straight Talk 13
Listen Actively

What Is Happening

Listening precedes speaking. Did you ever wonder why we offer a series of courses on public speaking but nary a one on public listening? Most of us hear ably, but listen ineptly. Active listening includes awareness, understanding, and reflection. Since most messages are delivered visually we listen more with our eyes. So when I'm not really seeing you, I'm not really listening to you either. Fortunately, it's a skill we can develop. Continuously.

What I Say

To myself: "Since the telephone is the next best thing to being there, I'll call."

What I Can Learn To Say

When talking on the phone: "Say, when I can't see you, I can't hear you. Drop by and let's really talk it out."

Straight Talk 14
Never Belittle

What Is Happening

In an environment characterized by a few powerful older learners and many powerless younger ones, there is sometimes an urgency for the former to exploit the power, size, age, and experiential shortcomings of the latter. While it allows us to feel better, it's a guarantee for them to feel worse. Might is not always right.

What I Say

Teacher to high school sophomore: "When you have more experience, Pam, you'll be able to see what I mean."

What I Can Learn To Say

"Pam, I can see I haven't made that very clear for you. Let me try again."

Straight Talk 15
Accept Sincere Compliments

What Is Happening

Often we deflect well intended and deserved praise with, "Oh, it was nothing," or "Anyone could have done as well." Such responses discount us as well as the speaker. A more positive reaction might be to accept. And to savor.

What I Hear

Principal to teacher: "Betsy, that was a splendid piece of work you did on the curriculum revision."

What I Can Learn To Say

"Thank you!"

Straight Talk 16
Accept Crooked Comments

What Is Happening

The law of the equivalent zap suggests that sooner or later revenge is yours. The temptation to render comeuppance to the zapper is irresistible. The verbal slings and arrows, however playful they seem, are actually the precursors of the heavy artillery which unerringly follows. A defense is to accept and to ignore. This behavior defuses the zapper.

What I Hear

Colleague to colleague: "Hey, Bob, I really like your new jacket! Too bad they didn't have your size!"

What I Can Learn To Say

"Thanks, Bill, I'm glad you like it."

Straight Talk 17
Accept Irrelevant Compliments

What Is Happening

Sometimes we receive "compliments" which are not job-related and are, therefore, usually meaningless. Favorable notice by a supervisor of a new article of clothing, for example, might privately evoke "I wonder what he thought about how I looked yesterday when he didn't say anything?" Again, an appropriate response is to acknowledge and to ignore.

What I Hear

Principal to teacher: "Susan, I really like that outfit you're wearing today."

What I Can Learn To Say

"Thank you."

Straight Talk 18
Avoid Verbal Abuse

What Is Happening

Whenever we load our language with abusive words, we cause our listener to become defensive. The loaded words are heard while the intended message is ignored. All abusive phrasing is non-caring. The speaker doesn't give a hoot and the words serve as livid proof. The speaker also reveals an inability to use language effectively. It's a lose-lose situation for both speaker and listener.

What I Say

Coach to player: "What in the world is wrong with you, Gary? That's the dumbest thing you've done this afternoon!"

What I Can Learn To Say

"Gary, let's take a look at your assignment on that last play."

Straight Talk 19
Speak Positively

What Is Happening

Self-deprecating thoughts immobilize us. Since 1) our behaviors reflect our thoughts and feelings; 2) our behaviors influence the thoughts and feelings of students; and 3) we can't fake them, then we might as well work on shaping positive assumptions regarding our own worth. Positive speech predictably and naturally follows. Try it; you'll like *you*! And so will significant others.

What I Say

To myself: "I don't know what's wrong with me. I can't cope anymore. Nothing I do seems to be right."

What I Can Learn To Say

"I'm not about to let a few disappointments get me down. I've got too much going for me. Now, where's that list of things I intended to do?"

Straight Talk 20
Talk Directly

What Is Happening

Much of our talk is indirect. It has something to do with prepositions. We talk "about," "despite," "around," and "through" people. In groups notice how one will talk "about" rather than "to" another even when that person is present. Indirect comments invite indirect responses. When you talk "to" people, they tend to respond similarly.

What I Say

Teacher in faculty meeting including Dave: "I'd like to hear what Dave thinks about this issue."

What I Can Learn To Say

"Dave, what is your position on this?"

Straight Talk 21
Disdain Preaching

What Is Happening

Championing causes is an American tradition. There are, of course, sufficient defensible causes seeking potential adherents. The schoolhouse burgeons with both. However tempting is the personal advocacy of economic, social, and political causes in classrooms, it is clearly a risky venture. A saner, safer approach is to examine objectively the agendas of groups in conflict.

What I Say

Instructor to science class: "The proposed local refinery will be environmentally destructive, will ultimately depress waterfront property values, and will deter the growth of our seafood industry."

What I Can Learn To Say

"There may be situations when national interests could or should prevail over environmental concerns. As we work through this unit, we'll identify and discuss those apparently conflicting situations."

Straight Talk 22
Consider Not Talking

What Is Happening

Most messages are conveyed without words. With some effort most of us can stop talking, but we're unable to stop communicating. As we learn more about body language, perhaps we can send and receive nonverbal messages with some degree of precision. One message which is always conveyed, with or without words, is our degree of liking the other person. We can't fake it.

What I Say

Teacher returning a high test result to a student who regularly tests well: "Linda, you did your usual good job!"

What I Can Learn To Say

Nothing. With direct eye contact, a gentle nod, and a warm smile, I've already said it all.

Straight Talk 23
Eliminate Rumors

What Is Happening

Perhaps no human trait is as predictably corrosive in schools as the deliberate spreading of unfounded rumors, innuendoes, half-truths, and truthful, but very personal, data about children or adults. The dearth of valid, relevant, and objective information contributes to a neurotic school climate. We can purposefully ask ourselves: "Is it true?" "Will the sharing of this information benefit someone?" If the answer to either or both is negative or uncertain, then suppress it!

What I Say

Teacher to teacher in lounge: "I've heard that the new girls' PE teacher is dating the captain of our football team."

What I Can Learn To Say

"_____."

Straight Talk 24
Disregard Labels

What Is Happening

What is the most important teacher characteristic? We could build a strong case for personal objectivity. Note the pervasive, or perversive, tendency to label learners. We harbor overt, covert, and even subvert gradations regarding a learner's intelligence, family status, energy level, regard for schooling, and other factors. Blended subjectively these "facts" become labels. Like fingerprints, the labels become permanent identifiers.

What I Say

Teacher to teacher: "Jimmy is an immature, dull, and listless child who showed no interest in anything we did last year. Besides, his parents couldn't care less about him. I hope you have better luck with him. You'll need it!"

What I Can Learn To Say

"I couldn't reach Jimmy last year. I'm confident you'll do better."

Straight Talk 25
Stress Clarity

What Is Happening

A frequently assumed characteristic of school people is that the prolixity of our verbosity is abominable. We apparently work in the only place where sound travels faster than light. Let's now admit that we often don't even understand each other. Of course, we may not be prepared for the consequences if we did!

What I Read

School official: "Our multigraded, individualized learning program is based upon a modified open-school approach."

What I Can Learn To Say

"Mrs. Smith, we're planning some exciting programs affecting your child. We need your ideas, too. Could you meet with us next Thursday?"

Straight Talk 26
Make Statements

What Is Happening

Another example of indirect talk is a tendency to ask questions when we really want to make statements. The question avoids direct contact and clouds ownership of the idea. Note these end-run statements at your next faculty gathering. We can raise our assertiveness quotient a few notches by making statements undisguised as questions. Will the *real* statement please rise?

What I Say

Teacher to colleagues: "Don't you think we should become more involved in planning our inservice programs?"

What I Can Learn To Say

"I want to be actively involved in planning for our staff development."

Straight Talk 27
Use Humor Productively

What Is Happening

A principal was once described as a person "having the happy faculty of keeping a faculty happy." We know that laughter does not necessarily affect either motivation or performance. It's not a question of humor, per se, but rather how humor is used. If one-liners are used to gloss over, to deflect, or to retreat from personal interaction, then we're avoiding constructive confrontation. Remember, principals never grow old. They just lose their faculties.

What I Say

Principal to assistant: "Mike, your handling of that situation reminds me of the guy, who, when asked if he could tell the difference between ignorance and apathy, replied, 'I don't know and I don't care!'"

What I Can Learn To Say

"As soon as this job permits us to sit down together for a few minutes, Mike, I want to discuss that incident with you."

Straight Talk 28
Keep Cool

What Is Happening

Those who work in schools are involved daily in hundreds of interpersonal contacts. To expect that all of these interactions will be cordial and productive is naive. We sometimes feel that one more complaining parent, one more antagonistic colleague, or one more PA announcement will ignite an explosion. Saying to ourselves, "Cool it!" only delays an outburst. Perhaps a personal contingency plan for facing crises is needed. A personal preventative maintenance plan is better still. Less stress and less mess.

What I Say

Male coach to female coach: "You know what you can do with Title IX. I want the court an additional 30 minutes today! Don't you people realize my season opens on Friday?"

What I Can Learn To Say

"Shirley, I need some additional court time tomorrow. Let's discuss it later over coffee."

Straight Talk 29
Be Venturesome

What Is Happening

As teachers we exercise more control over instructional variables than we're willing to acknowledge. Some constraints are formidable. We can't move walls or expand budgets overnight. Most of our constraints, however, are self-imposed. The familiar laments, "They won't let us," or "I can't do that," are usually cop-outs. "I can't," for example, is typically translated as "I won't!" Venturesomeness makes things happen in classrooms. There is no change without risk.

What I Say

Teacher to team leader: "We can't change our math series so quickly. There will be articulation problems. Students have only recently adjusted to what we're now doing."

What I Can Learn To Say

"Although I have some reservations about the change, I'm willing to work with it. I recall having some qualms about our current series. But now I like it!"

Straight Talk 30
Retire the War Stories

What Is Happening

War stories are personal accounts, appropriately exaggerated, which somehow survive from other times and other places only to be reincarnated in classrooms. They tend to lionize the teller. They also tend to be completely irrelevant. War stories do, however, consume time in the telling and signal inadequacies in the teaching. Let's save the heroic accounts for adults who *might* possibly have an interest and spare those pupils who haven't yet learned to defend themselves.

What I Say

Teacher to government class: "The president's action yesterday reminds me of the time I was in _____, and I _____, and then I _____."

What I Can Learn To Say

"What are some specific implications for *us* in the president's special message to the nation yesterday?"

Straight Talk 31
Choose Your Space

What Is Happening

Life is a many-splintered thing. When all that we're guaranteed is the insistent present called "now," our personal decisions regarding time, energy, and talent are vital. A commitment to anything requires an investment of these resources. Because we're unable to commit to everything, we need to choose our space. When we voluntarily and selectively invest our personal resources in meaningful activities, we're more likely to be happy, motivated, and productive.

What I Say

Principal to principal: "I know what the courts have decreed about dress codes, but I draw the line on wearing hats in school! Our new policy bans them altogether. Someone has to draw the line for these kids!"

What I Can Learn To Say

"Is such a policy worth the hassle of enforcement? And what about groups, like flagtwirlers, who wear hats as part of a uniform? I'd prefer talking with the student council on this issue. I can depend upon its taking appropriate action."

Straight Talk 32
Don't Play Therapist

What Is Happening

We've all had a little psychology. And a little knowledge is dangerous. For most of us more is catastrophic. Recognizing deviance is a legitimate expectation for teachers. Treating deviance clearly is not. Make referrals to designated counselors, school psychologists, and others who are trained and licensed in their specialties. We can then work with individual children consistent with third-party counsel. It's good ethics and good sense.

What I Say

Teacher to parent: "Your child has a personality disorder. Now, if you'd take my advice, you'd _____."

What I Can Learn To Say

"I want to describe some specific actions your child has taken this week. When I finish, and with your consent, I'd like to involve the school psychologist."

Straight Talk 33
Scorn Sarcasm

What Is Happening

Sarcasm is a form of verbal hostility. The speaker usually displays a holier-than-thou tone in demeaning the listener. Unfortunately, such contemptuous firing from ambush is pain inducing. More unfortunately, pupils are often the victims. While we cannot lessen the frequency and intensity of these barbs between and among students, we can modify our own behavior by avoiding such crooked talk.

What I Say

Teacher to middle-school pupil: "Who helped you with your homework, Wesley? You couldn't have done this badly by yourself!"

What I Can Learn To Say

"It seems as if my directions weren't clear, Wesley. Later this morning I'll go over this with you."

Straight Talk 34
Accept the Uniqueness of Others

What Is Happening

We see everything with our own uniqueness. It's as if we were issued a special set of goggles at birth. We view our world through them. Even when we temporarily exchange goggles with a special friend that person doesn't see our world the way we see it. And vision versa. Accepting another's uniqueness is the initial step for all those who seek to teach.

What I Say

Teacher to colleague: "For the life of me I don't know how he can see things that way."

What I Can Learn To Say

"First, I'll find out what he's looking at."

Straight Talk 35
Continue Refining Skills

What Is Happening

Improving communication skills is a lifetime pursuit. As we have learned some unproductive skills, so can we unlearn them. That is, if we want to. And, if we don't want to, then we should vacate those places called schools. Permanently.

What I Say

To anyone who will listen: "Don't expect me to change. That's the way I am. Nothing in my contract says I have to like what I do, those I work with, or, for that matter, the kids, and oh yes, especially their parents!"

What I Can Learn To Say

"I'm not renewing my contract."

Straight Talk 36
Take the Initiative

What Is Happening

Many interpersonal conflicts continue unresolved because one person waits for the other to re-start the conversation. Talking together, of course, is no guarantee of problem resolution. We are, however, assured an opportunity to resolve our differences. I will assume you are waiting for me to contact you, so I will. Let's keep the conversation going!

What I Say

Teacher to teacher: "I'll be darned if I will contact her again about her child. After that last conversation, oceans can freeze before I go through another hassle with her!"

What I Can Learn To Say

"However distressing our last conversation was, I will contact her today. I guess we're both trying to help her child in our own way."

Straight Talk 37
Avoid Giving Advice

What Is Happening

Perhaps nothing preempts a listener more readily than gratuitous advice. Ironically, when people appear to seek advice, they usually don't want it. They're seeking an active listener. The *other* person always determines the relevance and quality of counsel. If I follow your advice, it is only because I am willing to. My advice to myself just happens to agree with your advice to me. I'd rather you just help me advise myself. And keep your advice to yourself.

What I Say

Teacher to pupil: "If I were you, Kevin, I'd see your counselor as soon as possible."

What I Can Learn To Say

"Kevin, you're very upset about what happened. Perhaps you'd like to talk to someone."

Straight Talk 38
Own Your Feelings

What Is Happening

There isn't very much which we really own. But what we do own is vital. We own the interval between birth and death. And we own our feelings. When I'm angry, it's because I choose to be angry at that moment. If I blame you for my being angry, then I don't own it anymore. Situationally my feelings are uniquely mine. Since I can't give them to another, why try? Better to deal with my own feelings, acknowledge them, and, most importantly, be accountable for them.

What I Say

Teacher to youngster: "You're making me angry, Jack! Keep it up and see what happens to you!"

What I Can Learn To Say

"I am annoyed, Jack, when you interrupt others, because I'm unable to hear their comments.

Straight Talk 39
Self-Renew

What Is Happening

Another occupational affliction is chronic somnambulism. Some fall victims, while others are carriers. We overlook a basic tenet which suggests that we're either growing or dying. There is no status quo. We're verbs, not nouns. We're stretching, seeking, striving individuals. When did you last design an action plan for self-renewal? You need one. I need one. More precisely, our friends and co-workers need us to need one.

What I Say

To myself: "I've taught each summer for the last seven years."

What I Can Learn To Say

"This summer I'm taking a trip to the Orient. I need a new experience."

Straight Talk 40
Talk Straight

What Is Happening

This is a very small book about a very large topic. Wouldn't it be delightful if some straight talk items became standard talk in schools? And what if all of them became universals? In summary: Talk straight, play fair, tell the truth, keep your word, and refrain from trying to do something to or for young people. Always *with* them. Otherwise, there is no learning—or teaching either. Share your straight talk items. We might have yet another 40 ways to improve the quality of life in places called schools. Then, they'd be *perfect*! Well, . . . almost.

What I Say

"Thanks for the conversation."

What I Can Learn To Say

"Bob, if you really believe in all of this, you can stop writing and start talking straight. *Now!*"

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert Maidment is a professor of educational planning at the College of William and Mary. He earned three degrees from the University of Virginia and was awarded a post-doctoral John Hay fellowship. Maidment has been a member of the graduate faculty, Northwestern University, and an associate with Booz Allen & Hamilton, Inc., management consultants, Chicago. His work experience includes a decade of elementary and secondary principalships in Virginia and in Illinois. Currently, Maidment serves as co-director of the "Enhancing the Quality of Life in Schools" (EQUALS) research project funded by the Frost Foundation. Maidment is co-editor of *Criticism, Conflict, & Change*, co-author of *Simulation Games—Design and Implementation*, and author of *Robert's Rules of Disorder—A Guide to Mismanagement*.